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ABSTRACT

In the planning of school plants to serve the educational, social, civic, recreational, and cultural needs of the entire community, factors which receive special consideration are location of facilities, heat distribution, zoning, storage space, and special appointments and service features. (RH)

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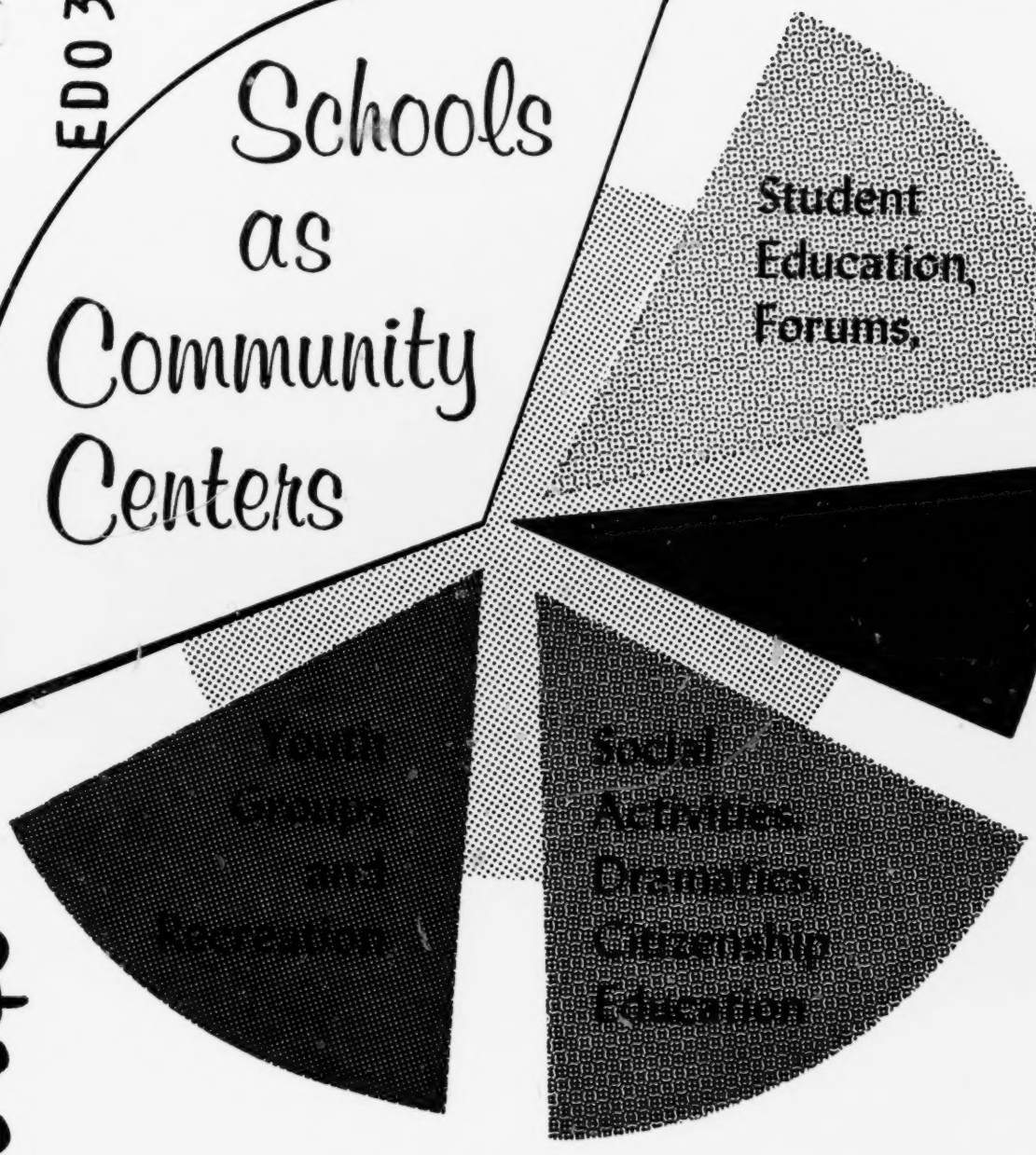
Schools as Community Centers



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The University of the State of New York
The State Education Department
Division of School Buildings and Grounds
Albany - 1960

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THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
DIVISION OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS
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DESIGNING THE SCHOOL PLANT AS A COMMUNITY CENTER

There is a growing sentiment among our school people that the school plant should be planned to provide not only for the educational needs, but also for many if not all the social, civic, recreational and cultural needs of the entire community. It is felt that if this can be done, in many instances inefficient utilization and duplication of costly building materials can be avoided. Furthermore, many feel that, as the school and community draw closer together, interest in and support of the regular school program by the community increase accordingly.

This leaflet presents certain suggestions for planning the school plant as a community center. School boards may find some if not all the suggestions desirable. In no sense is the leaflet meant to be a planning guide. Rather, it is designed to call attention to the problem and to stimulate and encourage local school officials and architects to give thoughtful consideration to community needs in the preparation of plans for a new school plant.

Each Community Should Study Its Own Needs

In planning and designing a school building primary consideration must be given to the school program. In addition to the day-school portion this program will logically include the immediate afterschool activities sponsored by the school, the adult education program and social and recreational activities such as a Saturday " Nite-club " or " Teenage Canteen."

School officials may wish to consult with their local Adult Education Advisory Committee prior to final decision on school design as an aid in determining the adaptability of proposed designs to the adult education program.

Following this the question to be asked is: What are the needs of the community which may be met by proper planning of the school plant? This question can be satisfactorily answered only in the community and by the community. The State Education Department can give some advice and guidance, but in the final analysis the needs should be worked out locally under the direction of the board of education and with the cooperation of interested citizens.

The superintendent and the principal should accept primary responsibility for guidance in this problem. They should be aware of, and should point out the possibilities of the use of school building facilities for community purposes. While the citizens must sanction and approve special activities, leadership in this matter rests mainly with the local school officials.

Pattern of Community Needs

As one talks with local school officials about this matter, a pattern of needs common to most communities takes form. Such community organizations as the following will need a suitable place for their activities: Grange, Farm Bureau, Home Bureau, 4-H Club, Red Cross, Junior Red Cross, Boy Scouts and Cubs, Girl Scouts and Brownies, parent-teacher organizations, service clubs, forums, community athletic teams. Other groups can be named. In addition, adult groups may use the school plant for classes in homemaking, farm machinery repair, physical education and other courses and activities.

Activities to be taken care of in the school plant — some connected with the foregoing organizations, others not — include: group meetings, banquets, dramatic entertainment, dancing, musicales, operettas, motion picture shows, public library and such games as basketball, volleyball, badminton, baseball, horseshoes, softball, ping-pong and various other table games.

Five Factors

Fortunately few if any additional facilities over and above those commonly found in a well-planned school building are needed to take care of these community activities. This does not mean that every well-planned building — that is, well-planned for the usual inschool educational program — lends itself readily to community use. Far from it.

Rooms in the school building may be used dually by the school and the community. Five factors must be given careful consideration in planning these rooms, however, if adequate provision is to be made for the community needs. These factors are:

1. Location in the building of facilities used by the community
2. Distribution of heat for unit and room control
3. Provision for adequate storage space for equipment and supplies
4. Special appointments and service features
5. Provision for toilet facilities and storage of outside wraps

1. **Location in the building of facilities used by the community.** So far as is practicable, the facilities used by the community should be so located, and grouped, (*a*) that they can be readily reached from the drives and parking areas (most of the people will drive to the building), (*b*) that they are readily accessible once the main vestibule is entered.

The Bethlehem Central Senior High School building is a good

example of the application of these two principles. Note in the diagram on page 6 that the drive swings near the main public entrance and that a parking area is nearby. Note also that on entering the main public vestibule one finds himself within a few feet of the entrances to the auditorium, the gymnasium, the cafeteria and the pool. The shops, both agriculture and industrial arts, and the classrooms are also readily accessible from one of the parking areas.

Many modern schools are being designed with the special subject areas — shops, arts and craft rooms, homemaking rooms — on the main floor. Thus these and other rooms commonly used by the public including the gymnasium, auditorium and cafeteria are centered near the public entrance.

2. **Distribution of heat for unit and room control.** The heating system should, as a measure of economy, be so designed that the rooms used for community purposes can be provided with heat adequate for occupancy while at the same time the rest of the building is maintained at a lower temperature. Separate steam mains can be run to such large units as gymnasium, auditorium and cafeteria. Further, each room which will have community use can be equipped with a dual thermostat. After school hours the custodian can, by a single action, set all thermostats for night temperature. Then by pressing a button on the face of the dual thermostat in each room to be used after school hours he resets that thermostat for daytime temperature.

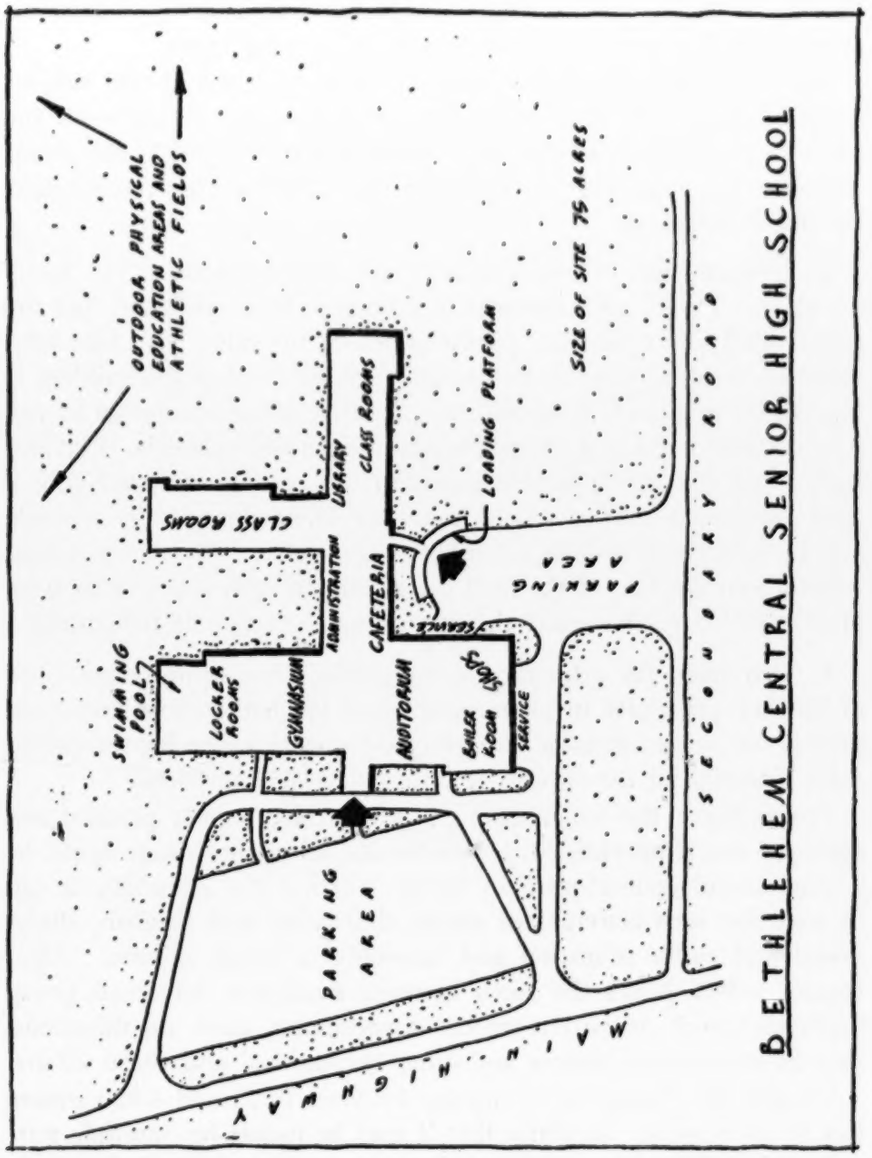
3. **Provision for adequate storage space for equipment.** One of the key principles in planning a room for both school and community use is that suitable and adequate storage space for the equipment essential for the various activities should be provided.

For example, the school dining room can, if properly planned and equipped and if provided with suitable and adequate storage space, be a most useful general-purpose room. During the schoolday it can be used for such activities as music, dramatics, oral English, study, visual and radio education and assembly of small groups. After regular school hours the room becomes invaluable for small group assemblies such as parent-teacher associations, farm organizations, Boy Scouts and for dances and other recreational and social affairs.

Usually the dining room contains between 1,000 and 4,000 square feet of floor space. In order that it may be usable for multiple purposes, the dining room should be completely separated from the kitchen and serving counter by a partition of permanent construction, should contain a small platform or stage at one end, should have thorough acoustical treatment, should be attractively decorated and should contain adequate storage space designed specifically for the

equipment that is considered essential to the various programs — in school, adult education or community — to be housed.

Let us take for example the use of this room for scout work. The three units of scouting should be considered — cubs, age 9–11; scouts, age 12–14; and senior scouts, age 15–17.



Cub packs should have a place to keep the pack emblem and to store many articles which the packs may purchase in quantity for loan or gift to the dens. Included in the list would be paints, beads, bead loom, books on handicraft work, special handicraft tools, leather, reed and clay supplies.

The character of equipment for scouts is going to be much influenced and perhaps the amount greatly augmented by the Federal Government's program of making surplus equipment stocks available to the scouts. In planning storage space for scouts this program should therefore be taken into account.

There should be storage space for both the troop and for each patrol. For the troop, provision should be made for storing such items as wall tents, walkie-talkies, pails, lanterns, camp chairs, cooking gear, Army trunk lockers, outing tools. For each patrol, provision should be made for storing such items as ropes, first-aid equipment, signal kits, flags, pup or explorer tents.

As a general recreation and social room for the community, the dining room has vast possibilities. The room should be equipped with ping-pong and other game tables of various types, radio and phonograph. Provision should be made to hang wraps, and the room for this purpose should be so placed as to serve the gymnasium and the auditorium as well as the cafeteria. Here again it is seen that the location of these three units in close proximity to each other is of great importance.

The question of what to do with the dining tables and chairs when the room is used for purposes other than dining is a difficult one, and one that, if not properly answered, interferes seriously with multiple use of the dining room. Three methods of handling this problem work out fairly well. One is to install folding tables and chairs and then to be sure to have adequate storage space for them. Another method is to provide a portable fold-away table and bench combination. These, too, will require storage space. A third but more expensive way is to install a fold-in-wall type of table and bench. With this latter type of installation the floor can be cleared after the lunch hour with a minimum of time and labor.

Three of the most frequently used areas for adult education or community use are the shops, the art room and the homemaking room. In each of these areas the problem of storage is a major one. The nature of any of these activities requires storage of bulky items. The storage of these items is further complicated by the addition of materials for community use and the necessity for storing incompleted projects. Provision should be made for separate storage facilities for adult education projects and materials in these areas in order to eliminate conflicts with the regular school program.

Another example of the need for storage space is in connection with the use of the gymnasium and lockers and showers by adults. These people, if they come regularly to the gymnasium, should have lockers in which to keep their gymnasium clothes and shoes. The present

practice of providing six or seven small gymnasium lockers for each large compartment locker makes it fairly easy and inexpensive to take care of this need. All that is required is to provide each adult with a small locker, 7½" or 9" by 12" by 24" for a gymnasium suit and shoes. Street clothes can be placed in one of the large compartment lockers which have already been provided for school use.

4. **Special appointments and service features.** Certain special appointments and service features, their character depending upon the community activity to be taken care of, should, of course, be provided. For example, with the increased use of the building at night, walks, drives and parking spaces should be well lighted. Play areas and courts designed for evening use should be equipped with floodlights.

Another example is the installation of gates at the foot of stairs and at strategic points in corridors so that traffic in the building can be restricted. Care should be taken, however, that needed exits are not blocked.

5. **Provision for toilet facilities.** It is essential that adequate toilet facilities be available for the community use of the school building. As a measure of economy, two sets of school toilets, one for boys and one for girls, can be so located that they will be readily available to the three units that will see the greatest amount of general public use — the gymnasium, the auditorium and the cafeteria.

In the event the above is difficult to plan, separate toilets for community use should be located near these facilities. There is a need for toilets that can be reached directly from the outdoor playing fields without entering the main part of the building. This is a very definite convenience, particularly as the playfields are frequently in use during times when the building is closed, such as late evenings, Saturdays, Sundays, other holidays and during the summer months. Drinking fountains should also be provided.

Adult Education

With the tremendous growth in adult education and the variety of its offerings, rooms should be designed to serve many purposes. For example, folding doors to divide the dining room into smaller rooms allow the tables therein to be used for conferences or discussions and forums. The easily cleaned tables also lend themselves to many types of activity.

The problem of storage of texts and charts in the area of civic and public affairs, of tools, materials and projects in the area of shop and

technical education, of materials in homemaking education, and of testing devices in safety and driver education is one which cannot be neglected. In many schools adult classes in these areas will be held in regular school classrooms. The inclusion of storage facilities in each classroom for the adult education program to be conducted therein will augment the quality of program that can be offered and will serve to eliminate much friction among members of the teaching staff.

Some provision for storage of outside wraps during periods when the school facilities are being used by the community is essential. Two practices now in use are (1) provision of a checkroom type of facility near the more frequently used areas, and (2) the use of portable coat racks for which storage must be available when they are not in use.

Some adult education activities will be served by the addition of extra electric outlets in one-third of the classrooms. Adult groups in sewing or certain other homemaking activities where the appliances are portable and are furnished by the participant will find these extra outlets convenient.

Facilities for adult use should include many types and sizes of spaces. Most modern classrooms with their attractive colors and movable chairs and desks which may be arranged to meet the convenience of intimate discussion groups satisfy this requirement. In addition, rooms such as lounges, library conference rooms or a browsing room near the entrance will accent informality and offset inhibitions arising out of past educational experiences. These same facilities have their place in the regular school program.

Schools employing a full-time director of adult education should provide adequate office space.

Custodial Service

Another matter, not related directly to planning the building, but one that is an important factor in the use of the school building for community purposes, is custodial service.

The question of payment for custodial service when the school plant is being used for community purposes is a troublesome one. In some places the organizations using the building pay the custodian for his extra service, which usually consists of opening the building, staying on duty during the activities and then locking up after the activity is over and the people have gone home.

The more common practice is for the school board to assume full responsibility for custodial service for community activities. With the increasing use of the school plant for community purposes, this is

becoming, and should become, the universal practice. Specific, written rules, insuring consistency, should be adopted.

In a school building with a single janitor, the janitor may need an assistant to look after the community use of the plant. This assistant should be employed by the board and should be responsible to the board. If the heating system has automatic controls such as may be found with an oil burner or a coal stoker, the assistant need not be skilled in firing a furnace. He should be a responsible person who can clean up and straighten around after the activity is over and who can be depended upon to protect school property.

Looking after the plant during community activities need not in all cases be an extra expense. Many times it will be possible to schedule regular cleaning work during the late afternoon and evening, so that the custodian performs the dual service of carrying on his regular work while he keeps part of the building open for community use.

The shifting of equipment in a room used for a variety of purposes requires careful planning by the custodian. For example, in the dining room the custodian's schedule should provide for clearing the room of tables and chairs immediately after luncheon and for sweeping the floor. The room is then ready and available for other activities until just before the lunch hour of the next day, when tables and chairs again must be set up.

Another example relates to taking care of toilets which are used by both school and community. Scrupulous care should be taken that after every community affair the toilets are thoroughly cleaned and made ready for school use the next day.

Costs

One of the most gratifying aspects of planning a school plant for community use is that but little extra cost is required. Few if any extra rooms need be added. If the five factors discussed in the foregoing pages are given careful consideration, the board of education has reasonable assurance that certain commonly recognized community needs are well taken care of and that but little extra cost has been incurred. The cost of custodial service will be increased but with careful planning the increase can be held to a low figure.

Furthermore, in appraising the extra costs involved it should be realized that separate plants to take care of school and community needs would, in construction and operation and maintenance, be far more costly. The tax dollar yields more if the school building has both school and community use. Moreover, rich dividends in community interest in and support for the school are gained.